Major polluters melting the snow of the winter sports they sponsor, new report finds

- High-carbon sponsors of winter sports, such as car makers, fossil fuel companies and airlines are melting the future of the very sports they sponsor - the report identifies 107 high carbon sponsorship deals with skiing organisations, event organisers, teams and with individual athletes.

- Due to global heating linked to greenhouse gas emissions, compared to 1970, each year the snow cover in the northern hemisphere shrinks by an additional estimated 90,600 square kilometres, over one fifth the size of Sweden and over one third the size of Great Britain.

- Emissions from two sponsors of the ski world’s version of the London Marathon, Sweden’s famous Vasaloppet ski race, account for the loss of 210 square kilometres of snow cover per year, equivalent to 233 times the snow area used by the race.

- Winter sports are increasingly vulnerable to rising global temperatures and other impacts of climate change, with many European ski resorts facing closures and disruptions this winter.

- International sporting events are coming under scrutiny over sponsorship deals with polluting companies, after a series of high-profile deals ended over climate change concerns.

The future of winter sports is being threatened by the very companies that sponsor it, argues a new report from Badvertising, the campaign to stop adverts from major polluters fuelling the climate emergency and think-tank, New Weather Sweden. Compared to 1970, each year the snow cover in the northern hemisphere shrinks by an additional estimated 90,600 square kilometres, equivalent to over one third the area of Great Britain.

On the eve of the world’s biggest cross country ski race, the report, titled ‘The Snow Thieves - How High-Carbon Sponsors are Melting Winter Sports’, identifies a minimum of 107 high carbon sponsorship deals and highlights the irony that the combined emissions of two of the sponsors of Sweden’s world-famous Vasaloppet - the London Marathon of ski races, car manufacturer Volvo and energy firm Preem, account for the loss of 210 square kilometres of snow cover - or the area of snow equivalent to 233 Vasaloppet ski races.

Winter sports are becoming increasingly vulnerable to climate change and rising global temperatures. Under a high-emissions scenario, winters could be as short as 31 days by the end of the century.\(^1\) Without deep and immediate emissions cuts, the future of winter sports is in doubt.

**Lizzy Yarnold, Britain’s most successful Winter Olympian says:** “At their best winter sports are a celebration of people enjoying some of the most awesome landscapes on Earth.

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But the impact of climate pollution is now melting the snow and ice which these sports depend on. Having high carbon sponsors is like winter sport nailing the lid on its own coffin, and it needs to stop."

**Emil Johansson Kringstad, former elite cross-country skier from Sweden says:** "While skiing and other winter sports take sponsorship from people and companies who are destroying the climate, the snow cover in the northern hemisphere is disappearing. The climate crisis is here, and winter sports are promoting it by advertising the use of products that are frying the planet and destroying the sport we love. It is a big irony that fossil fuel sponsorships are so common in a sport that is heavily dependent on cold winters and snow. We need to take responsibility and stop accepting fossil fuel sponsorships and promoting climate destruction. Fossil fuel companies are melting the snow of winter sports, and it needs to stop."

With less snow falling over fewer weeks, winter sports seasons are becoming shorter. Not only will this cause disruption and uncertainty to winter sports athletes and spectators, it will also throw the livelihoods of thousands of people that rely on winter sports into doubt. For the European skiing tourism market, an average warming of 2°C is expected to generate a loss of 10.1 million guest nights per winter season and an even greater loss of ski lift ticket sales. European ski resorts experienced winter temperatures above 20°C this year and many were forced to close, with images of snow-less hills circulating in the media.

Rising global temperatures will greatly reduce where international winter sports tournaments can take place without the use of artificial snow - an often energy intensive process in itself. By the end of this century, only one city out of the last 21 Winter Olympic host cities will still have a climate that can support the winter games.² The trend towards creating artificial environments for winter sports is gaining ground with the Beijing Winter Olympics being the first to rely almost entirely on artificial snow, and with Saudi Arabia set to host the 2029 Asian Winter Games at a planned mountain resort within the £440bn Neom project and believed to be interested in bidding for the the 2030 Winter Olympics.

**Anna Jonsson, co-director of New Weather Sweden, said:** "The activities of high-carbon sponsors of winter sports are destroying the very conditions those sports need to survive. As the impacts of climate change become impossible to ignore, winter sports must end its relationship with polluting companies that use sponsorship to improve their corporate image, while their business activities undermine the very future of winter sports."

There is growing international momentum behind sports events ditching high-carbon sponsors over climate change concerns. Last year, Tennis Australia ended its multi-year sponsorship deal with oil and gas giant, Santos, after concerns were raised by campaigners over ‘sportswashing’.³ Beyond the world of sport, an increasing number of towns, cities and countries are bringing forward legislation to regulate and ban advertisements of high-carbon or environmentally damaging goods and services.

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² Climate change and the future of the Olympic Winter Games: athlete and coach perspectives (2022)  

³ “Tennis Australia ends partnership with Santos after one year” (2022)  
Andrew Simms at Badvertising said: “There are few clearer signs of a dangerously heating climate than the fact that the last Winter Olympics had to rely entirely on making fake snow. Major climate polluters are the snow thieves, and having them sponsor winter sports that need reliably cold winters is like being sponsored by a burglar who keeps stealing from your home. Sport ended tobacco sponsorship over health concerns, it needs to do the same with major polluters, not just to protect athletes, the planet and the public, but the future of sport.”

Dom Winter, Head of Programs at Protect Our Winters UK, said: “Winter sports face an existential threat as a result of climate change reducing snowfall and snow cover. An increasing number of winter athletes are waking up to this reality – and it’s now time for tournament organisers to do the same. To align winter sports with a future where they can thrive, teams and tournament organisers must pull the plug on polluting sponsorships.”

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Notes to editors:

1. For the calculation of the loss of snow cover, we have used data and information from Rutgers University Snow Lab showing an overall annual northern hemisphere loss of 90,600 km² of May snow cover since 1970. There is an approximately linear relationship between the global surface air temperature in a given year and the cumulative CO2 emissions up to that year, we have used the yearly CO2 emissions of 36.3 billion tonnes and calculated the effect on changes in May snow cover to be 2.5 m² per tonne of CO2 per year (90,600 km² per year / 36 billion tonnes CO2 per year = 2.5 m² per tonne of CO2 per year).

Using this figure and multiplying with the yearly emissions of CO2 by Volvo Cars and Preem (32+52 = 84 million tonnes), we conclude that the two companies could account for the destruction of 80 km² and 130 km² of snow cover each year respectively, or 210 km² together. Compared to the total area of snow cover needed for the Vasaloppet ski race, 0.9 km², this translates to the elimination of 89 Vasaloppet for Volvo Cars and 144 Vasaloppet for Preem, or 233 Vasaloppet for the two sponsoring companies together. The calculation is also explained in further detail in section 2 of the report, Climate change impacts on winter sports.

2. Badvertising is a campaign to stop adverts and sponsorship fuelling the climate emergency, set up by the New Weather Institute and run jointly with campaign groups Possible and Ad Free Cities.

3. The Snow Thieves is published by the New Weather Institute and New Weather Sweden in association with Possible, and the Rapid Transition Alliance for the Badvertising campaign.